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ABSTRACT

The Texas Information Exchange (TIE) is a state-wide library network organized in 1967 for the purpose of sharing resources among Texas libraries. Its membership includes 37 college and university libraries, the Texas State Library, and ten public libraries that serve as Major Resource Centers in the Texas State Library Communications Network. In April 1978, the members of TIE were surveyed on their use of computer-based reference services; this report provides a summary of their questionnaire responses concerning 15 different topics, numbered to correspond to the questions on the survey form: libraries providing computer-based reference services, vendors and numbers of searches, data bases searched most frequently, average search time, organization, equipment, marketing, users, financing, evaluation, impact, SDI or current awareness services, batch searching, numeric or statistical data, and future plans. The survey form is included. (Author/JD)

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USE OF COMPUTER-BASED REFERENCE SERVICES IN TEXAS INFORMATION EXCHANGE LIBRARIES

by

Gary L. Menges

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USE OF COMPUTER-BASED REFERENCE SERVICES IN TEXAS INFORMATION EXCHANGE LIBRARIES*

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The Texas Information Exchange (TIE) is a state-wide library network organized in 1967 for the purpose of sharing resources among Texas libraries. The membership currently includes thirty-seven college and university libraries, the Texas State Library, and the ten public libraries which serve as Major Resource Centers in the Texas State Library Communications Network. In April 1978 the members of TIE were surveyed on their use of computer-based reference services. Since TIE includes most of the major academic and public libraries in Texas and perhaps those Texas academic and public libraries most likely to have computer-based reference services, the results of the survey can give us some idea of the current usage of computer-based reference services in Texas academic and public libraries.

The following is a summary of questionnaire responses. The numbers refer to specific questions on the survey form.

1) Libraries Providing Computer-based Reference Services

Only two of the ten TIE public libraries (Austin Public and Dallas Public) indicated that they provide computer-based reference services. One library indicated that they referred users to a private agency and I imagine that this is probably true of some other public libraries. None of the public libraries without these services indicated plans to offer them within the next two years. The Texas State Library, although it does not do searching in-house, reported that it accepts queries from users for Information Bank searches and refers them to the Dallas Public Library.

Among TIE academic libraries the usage of computer-based reference services is much greater than in public libraries. Twenty libraries indicated the provision of such services; sixteen reported that they did not currently offer these services but eight of these indicated plans to do so within the next two years. In addition, I understand that the one library (the University of Houston) which did not return the survey form does offer computer-based reference services. Thus 78 percent of the TIE academic libraries are offering or plan to offer such services.

2) Vendors and Numbers of Searches

Seventeen libraries reported having access to Lockheed data bases, thirteen to SDC, seven to NLM, six to BRS, six to AMIGOS (i.e., sending search requests to the AMIGOS headquarters for the actual searching), and three to The Information Bank. A few other vendors or files were mentioned. The most used being the on-campus searching of the ERIC and Psychological Abstracts

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*This summary of the responses to the April 1978 TIE survey on the "Use of Computer-based Reference Services" was prepared for presentation at the May 19, 1978 workshop in Austin on "Integrating Online Reference Services in Libraries." The workshop was sponsored by the Texas Library Association College and University Libraries Division and Reference Round Table and the General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.

data bases at the UT Austin General Libraries. Approximately the two most recent years of the latter files are made available at scheduled times for free searching through the University's Computation Center. The General Libraries trains users to do their own searching on library or departmental terminals.

Statistics on the number of online searches in TIE libraries during the twelve month period of April 1977 through March 1978 are incomplete. Twenty libraries were able to offer some statistics though some of these are estimates. A total of 15,857 searches were reported for the six vendors mentioned above. The breakdown by vendor is as follows: 1) NLM - 10,989, 2) Lockheed - 4,159, 3) SDC - 323, 4) The Information Bank - 250, 5) AMIGOS Centralized Computer-Based Reference Service - 134, and 6) BRS - 2. Of the NLM searches 98 percent were performed in four medical libraries providing statistics.

3) Data Bases Searched Most Frequently

Apart from MEDLINE in the health science libraries, overall the most popular data bases searched seem to be ERIC and Psychological Abstracts.

4) Average Search Time

Although time estimates are very rough, the overall average search time including user interview, formulation, online, and followup time is 57 minutes in general academic libraries, and 41.5 minutes in the health science libraries. Dallas Public reported an average of 56 minutes. The breakdown is as follows for the general academic libraries with the equivalent times for the health science libraries in parentheses: user interview - 18.3 minutes (11.25), formulation - 13.4 minutes (11.25), online - 10.9 minutes (11), and followup - 14.4 minutes (8).

5) Organization

Administrative responsibility for these services is generally in Public Services. In response to the question, "Where are these services located within your library's organization?" thirteen libraries indicated in the reference department and eight in other locations. Of the latter six indicated separate departments or units.

The number of library staff members trained to search ranged from one to a high of sixteen with a total of seventy-five searchers reported. Seven libraries have three searchers, the most popular number. As might be expected, the more searchers available in a given library the more likely searchers specialize by data bases rather than searching all data bases. Various factors were cited in selecting librarians for training as searchers including background and experience, interest, aptitude, and subject specialization. Forty-five searchers have attended basic vendor training sessions; fifty-two, advanced vendor training sessions; thirty-seven have attended data base producer seminars; and twenty-six have received in-house training.

6) Equipment

Texas Instruments terminals were most often cited as the computer terminals used in online searching. Most libraries had only one terminal. Only two libraries, Dallas Public and SMU, reported using 1200 baud terminals.

7) Marketing

Librarians were asked to rank in order of effectiveness various means of marketing. In tabulating the top three from each library, word of mouth was considered the most effective followed by talks and seminars, brochures, mailings, demonstrations, and newspapers or newsletters. If the latter and brochures and mailings are combined, publications of various kinds are judged the most effective.

8) Users

Most of the users of computer-based reference services in academic libraries are graduate students or faculty with very little use by undergraduates reported. East Texas, TWU, and UT Austin reported approximately two-thirds of their use was by graduate students. Austin College reported that faculty accounted for 100 percent of their use; UT Health Science Center at San Antonio, 80 percent; and Texas A & M, 60 percent. Only two libraries, Rice and SMU, reported widespread use by non-university clients. Both libraries provide fee-based services to the business and industrial communities. At SMU, 98 percent of the use was from industrial clients and at Rice, 80 percent of the use was by clients of Rice's Regional Information and Communication Exchange. Dallas Public reported that 75 percent of their users were business or industrial clients. The user was most likely to be present at the terminal when the search was run in general academic libraries. Several of these libraries reported that this was true over 90 percent of the time although other libraries reported a much lower percentage. Several libraries reported that users participated in the search process by assisting in the selection of search terms.

9) Financing

All libraries except Austin College reported charging some users. The Dallas Public Library does not charge eligible users of the Public Interest Information Network and UT Austin General Libraries do not charge for Information Bank searches or for searches conducted on the in-house ERIC and Psychological Abstracts data bases. Most libraries charge a prorated fee based on charges for computer connect time, communications, and offline prints. Rice and SMU charge non-university users a service fee, and Texas A & M charges profit making organizations a service fee. The average charge in a general academic library ranged from $5 to $45 with an overall average of $17.25.

10) Evaluation

Five general academic libraries reported that formal evaluations of searches are completed by users. None of the public libraries or health sciences libraries reported formal user evaluations.

11) Impact

Respondents were asked to indicate the degree which best describes their feelings regarding five statements about the impact of online searching. Sixteen of the academic libraries (including the health science libraries) agreed or strongly agreed that online searching is being utilized by some individuals who did not previously use library services. Only one academic library respondent disagreed but both public library respondents disagreed. A second impact statement read, "Since online searching was first offered, interlibrary loan borrowing requests from our users have increased and some of this increase is attributable to online searching." Again, sixteen of the academic libraries agreed or strongly agreed and only one disagreed. Both public libraries disagreed. On the other hand, only six academic libraries agreed that they had had to subscribe to new journals as a direct result of increased requests from online users whereas eleven academic and the two public libraries disagreed. All but two academic libraries and the two public libraries agreed or strongly agreed that their users have a more positive attitude about their staff's expertise since online searching has been available. Fifteen academic and one public library agreed or strongly agreed that users' expectations of what services the library can provide have increased since the advent of online searching. Only two academic and one public library disagreed.

12) SDI or Current Awareness Services

Only one library, the UT Austin General Libraries, reported a major SDI program. UT Austin had 717 current profiles in April 1978 and was utilizing four data bases for a free in-house SDI program. Four health science libraries reported SDI, all with charges and most utilizing SDILINE. The number of profiles ranged from 7 to 108. Three other academic libraries reported providing SDI through vendors with from one to five profiles.

13) Batch Searching

Three health science libraries and one academic library reported using batch searching.

14) Numeric or Statistical Data

Other than statistical data bases available through the commercial vendors, only one library reported searching numeric data bases. Texas A & M searches the Census tapes and Standard and Poor's Compustat. The UT Austin General Libraries reported publishing a Social Science Data File Directory in 1975 which inventoried non-bibliographic data files available on the UT Austin campus.

15) Future Plans

Several libraries indicated changes planned for the next two years. Seven libraries plan to increase marketing, six libraries hope to acquire additional terminals, four libraries would like to train additional staff to search, three libraries plan to add new vendors, three libraries plan to do additional evaluations of their services, and one library hopes to experiment with batch SDI. As indicated above, eight libraries without online services plan to add them within the next two years.

Responses to the survey would indicate that at least among the academic TIE libraries online searching of bibliographic data bases for reference purposes is becoming a more widespread and a more important library service.

May 19, 1978

TEXAS INFORMATION EXCHANGE

USE OF COMPUTER-BASED REFERENCE SERVICES

Instructions:
1) If additional comments are required to answer a yes/no question, please add your comments on a separate sheet identifying the comment with the question number.
2) If you cannot provide quantative information, please provide an estimate and write "est." after the information.
3) If the information is not available write "N/A;" if not applicable, write "Not applicable."
4) A search is defined as one user request processed against one data base.
5) A stamped self-addressed envelope is enclosed. Please return the questionnaire even if your answer to #1 is no.
6) If you have any questions, please call Gary Menges at 512-471-3811 or 821-3811 (TEX-AN).

PLEASE RETURN QUESTIONNAIRE BY APRIL 21.

Library _____

Name of Respondent _____

Respondent's phone number _____ TEX-AN number _____

1. Does your library provide computer-based reference services? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please answer the following questions. If no, and you are planning to offer such services please answer question 15 before returning.

2. Files searched online:

Vendor	Month/Year Began Searching	Number of Searches Last 12 Months (April 1977-March 1978)
AMIGOS		
BRS		
Information Bank		
Lockheed		
Medlars		
SDC		
Other (Please Specify)		

3. Which data bases are searched most frequently? _____

4. Average search time in minutes:

User interview _____
Formulation time _____
Online time _____
Followup time _____

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5. Organization:

a. Who has administrative responsibility for these services (position)?

_____

b. Where are these services located within your library's organization?

Reference_____
Separate department_____
Separate unit within a department/division_____
Please indicate department/division_____
Various staff coordinated by individual_____
Other_____

c. Searchers:

How many library staff members search?_____
If more than one searcher, do the searchers:
Specialize by data bases?_____
Search all data bases?_____
How were the searchers selected?_____
_____
What training have searchers received? (Indicate number receiving each.)
Vendor:
Basic_____
Advanced_____
Data base producer_____
In-house_____

6. Equipment:

a. What terminals are you using for online searching?_____

_____

b. If you use more than one terminal are they in the same location?

Yes_____ No_____ (Please specify departmental locations.) _____

_____

c. Do you use a 1200 baud terminal? Yes_____ No_____

7. Marketing:

Which of the following have you used? (Please number those used in order of effectiveness, e.g., one for most effective, etc.)

Brochures/flyers*_____
Posters_____
Mailings*_____
Demonstrations_____
Special seminars/talks_____
News releases*_____
TV_____
Radio_____
Newspapers_____
Free searches for individuals_____
"Word of mouth"_____
Other_____

*Please enclose samples

8. Users:

a. User community:

	total number	percent of total use represented by this category
1. Academic libraries		
Undergraduates		
Graduate students		
Faculty		
Staff		
Other		

2. Public libraries
   a. Size of user community _____
   b. Percent of total use by _____ business/industry
      _____ student
      _____ general public

b. In what percent of searches are users present at the terminal when searches are run? _____

c. Please briefly describe any way other than 8.b. that the user participates in the search process. _____

_____

_____

_____

9. Financing:

a. Do you charge users? Yes_____ No_____

If yes,
Fixed fee _____
Prorated fee based on computer connect time, offline prints, etc._____
Other (specify)_____ _____
_____

b. If you charge users, is the same rate structure used for all users? Yes___ No___

If no, please describe how the rate structure differs.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

c. If you charge users which costs are charged?

Computer connect time _____
Communications charges _____
Offline prints _____
Other (Please indicate cost elements built-in or considered in other charges.)
_____

_____

d. What is the average cost of a search to a user? _____

e. If there are no user charges, how are the online costs absorbed by the library (grants, special funding, etc.)?

_____

_____

10. Evaluations:

Are formal evaluations of searches completed by users? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please enclose a sample form and comment briefly on evaluation (effectiveness, etc.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

11. Impact:

We frequently talk about the impact online searching has had on our institutions and its users. This impact is difficult to quantify. Please check below the degree which best describes your feelings about the following impact statements. (Note: This question adapted from Gloria Werner's MEDLINE Search Center questionnaire.)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Online searching is being utilized by some individuals who did not previously use library services.	_____	_____	_____	_____
b. Since online searching was first offered, interlibrary loan borrowing requests from our users have increased and some of this increase is attributable to online searching.	_____	_____	_____	_____
c. We have had to subscribe to new journals as a direct result of increased requests from online users.	_____	_____	_____	_____
d. Our users have a more positive attitude about our staff's expertise since online searching has been available.	_____	_____	_____	_____
e. Users' expectations of what services the library can provide have increased since the advent of online searching.	_____	_____	_____	_____

12. Does your library offer SDI or current awareness services? Yes_____ No_____

If yes, are these services provided through a commercial vendor_____ or locally____ (i.e., tapes leased or purchased and run through local computer facilities).

If yes, please complete the following:

Data Base	Number Profiles	Frequency of Run	Average # Citations	Charge?	Abstracts Provided?	Average Cost Per Profile Per Run
____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

13. Does your library employ batch searching (other than for SDI) for reference purposes?

Yes_____ No_____ If yes, please describe briefly. _____

14. Do you provide any access to numeric or statistical data, e.g., census tapes, directory of data files, etc.? Yes_____ No_____ If yes, please describe briefly.

15. Future Plans:

Please indicate any changes planned for the next two years (e.g., in services offered, staffing, finance, etc.).

16. Comments:

Please add any comments pertaining to computer-based reference services not covered in this questionnaire.

PLEASE RETURN BY APRIL 21 to:

Gary L. Menges, TIE Survey
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Austin, Texas 78712